

Impermanence by mialeave

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“maybe we just need to stop depending on each other to feel happy”

Or

The Mileven college breakup no one asked for.

Impermanence

It had been different in the beginning, but it couldn't last. When Mike had first got his acceptance letter to Columbia University, they'd calmed their dread. Filled themselves with assurances of calls and visits as though filling the impending space. As hard as it would be, it was Mike's dream.

"I'm gonna make a difference, El. You'll see."

But El had already seen. Every day he had spent with her - teaching her about the world, helping her figure out who she wanted to be - had made a difference. He had changed El's life completely. Their paths led in different directions, but she would never discourage him from pursuing his dreams. She'd been there, working tirelessly with him for finals, helping him write the fourth draft of his application essay. He'd hum his favourite song as he worked, and she'd hush him, needing silence to concentrate. In return, Mike helped Eleven find a career she cared about. She wanted to follow the footsteps of her Dad, Hopper, and join the police. To be the hero she had needed when she was a child. She had never been especially academically gifted - missing fourteen years of formal education does that to a person - but she still wanted to help people however she could.

By the time Mike to leave, both he and El were confident they would make it work. After all, they had gone through so much together, college was nothing by comparison. Mike settled in quickly to university life, the lessons were intriguing and challenging, the people really friendly. El distracted herself from his absence by starting an internship at Hawkins Police Station. She was able to occasionally shadow officers when they went out, learning from them and appreciating every bit of advice they gave her. Most of the time though she was stuck behind a desk doing paperwork. Nevertheless, she kept at it. They spoke on the phone three times a week, Mike gushing about all the new things he was doing and El telling Mike all about her time out of the office.

It wasn't until weeks after Mike first left that they were able to see each other again. El drove the whole day but when she finally saw Mike she knew it was worth it. She met his friends and saw where he

hung out. Here, he seemed more confident talking to people and laughed so often, it was fascinating for her to see this other side of him. It continued like that, them both trying to see each other every couple of weeks, taking turns to make the long drive. Thanksgiving break El was ecstatic to have Mike back for the week and he seemed to relax into the comfortability of his home. But something was off, he seemed to yearn for more adventure than the small Indiana town could give. He had the decency to feel some guilt for looking forward to returning to New York.

Christmas break seemed to come and go in no time, especially considering Mike came home almost a week after his final exam, spending the start of his holidays celebrating with his new friends. El had been a little upset at that, wanting selfishly for him to want to spend his entire vacation with her. But once he arrived it was as though he never left, they spent nights together at the log cabin where El used to live, and on the day after Christmas they hung out with all their friends to exchange presents and catch up on what had happened in their lives.

“So how is it? Being together again?” Max had cautiously asked El under the shadow of Mike’s basement. The boys had found Mike’s old Dungeons and Dragons set and were excitedly clambered around the table, reminiscing their twelve-hour campaigns. Eleven had thought when Mike returned they’d feel and be normal again. But it had felt different being alone. They once lived joined lives, knowing each other as instinctively as they knew how to breathe. Now, El had discovered she no longer enjoyed silence, but Mike had a different habit. They were out of sync, both aware but too scared to admit. So instead, she gave him his space, her and Max remained lounging on the sofa.

El looked over at Max in acknowledgment. They had grown even closer since the boys had all gone off to college. Max had got a job in a restaurant in the middle of town, not enjoying any subject in school enough to major in it. They hung out when neither of them was on shift. El’d talk to Max rather than Mike when she was upset, knowing he would feel the desire to drive back to comfort her. Consequently, Max knew about El anxieties about them growing more distant.

If El were honest, she’d say it was hard more often than not. Lately,

Mike had been studying for his midterms and during their downtime he and his friends all went out. Their phone calls had grown less frequent, now once a week and occasionally on weekends. El also had been less available, there was a case at work that she was called to assist on and it had eaten into her free time. She didn't mind though, she loved the work. It also helped she had met friends both inside and outside of work, such as Greg McCorkle. She'd known him vaguely at school, and he had joined as an intern at the same time as El, and they hung out and helped each other with the excessive workload of paperwork. He even came and hung out with her and Max every week or two.

"It's good, now he's finally had the decency to come back." The dig at Mike's expense wasn't unearned, but El still felt bad for saying it.

"Just try and make the most of the time he's back. He'll have to go again before you know it and you'll regret it if you don't." El knew Max was right, as she usually was. Max had become pretty wise once she stopped trying to fight everyone, though it had to be said Lucas had also played a part in mellowing her. Lucas had gotten into the University of Chicago this year, though. Nevertheless, he fought to come home every two-to-three weeks. Their closeness was tooth-rotting; a startling sweetness, sickening El and painting her green. She could only manage small doses, lest she succumb to the queasiness and be forced to scrutinise the sensations in her stomach she was ignoring. A stomach whose butterflies seemed to be perishing, energy seeping with every appearance. She loved Mike, but the sad longing for him lessened with each utterance of goodbye, the excitement to see him decreasing as time went on.

"I know, I do love having him back. To actually see him feels so weird." They both smiled at this, fondly agreeing.

"-yeah. Hey, El do you remember the time we tried to get you to play?" Lucas called to El from across the room, forcing back memories of confusion and misunderstanding in El's head. He walked over, sliding in beside max and snaking his arm around her.

"Get me to play? I just sat there for two hours while you all tried to explain all the rules, it was endless, and we didn't even have time to start a game." El replied and they all laughed at that. It was true,

trying to take an interest in their game was a mistake. She was lost within the first five minutes.

“I’d give you more credit than that, you managed to at least get the basics by the end of it,” Mike said defensively, squeezing in next to El on the sofa. Will and Dustin followed, falling onto two of the many chairs. She adjusted to lean against him and he put his arm around her. They shared a smile of solidarity, feeling reunited at last with one another.

El had not been the only one to notice the distance. While Mike knew that while there were completely typical reasons why they had heard less from each other, he still missed speaking to El. At college, he had no problem making new friends, but he still got home sick from time to time. On those days, he’d call El and they’d talk for hours, reassuring Mike that she was still there for him. But, sometimes she would be out with friends or staying late at work. When that happened, he’d throw himself into his social life, going for nights out with his friends and messing around in the stupid way only college kids could. It happened both ways, sometimes El would call him, and he would already have left to meet up with his friends. They seemed to just miss each other. Lately, they missed each other more than they spoke.

Now he was home for Christmas and they should be able to talk as they always used to. Him being home, now for more than just a week, was like holding up a mirror to differences in their relationship. They were different. El now had new favourite hangouts she and Mike had never been to, she’d gone on her first road trip for a week with Will, Max, and Lucas, she had spent an entire day watching back to back movies with Greg at the Hawkins’ movie marathon in the park. This irked Mike; he had wanted to be there the first time El experienced these things.

But he couldn’t get angry, he lived in a whole new city with new friends. He had discovered more about himself in the past few months than he had in the last three years in the small town of Hawkins. Like, that he had a natural talent for skateboarding despite always sucking at PE, or that he could play guitar without it sounding too out of tune. He was growing, free from his inattentive parents and able to express himself without feeling he was being judged.

There were no more watchful eyes of gossiping neighbours, no one on the street even knew his name. He was free to make himself over a hundred times a day if he wanted to. He could see the upset in Eleven's eyes; the realisation that each time she saw him he seemed to be growing more and more alien to her. They planned most of their days as a group, their friend's chatter and bickering filling the holes in their conversations, allowing Eleven and Mike to feel more comfortable.

The group was reunited within a week to bring in the New Year together; Jim and Joyce were hosting a party for everyone and their families. It was a fun night filled with singing, dancing, and even party games. Mike and El had been truly happy, surrounded by her family and friends, and for the first time in ages, it felt as if Mike had never left. They laughed and were carefree all night, Mike keeping El close beside him, treasuring the feeling of being together. When midnight approached the group yelled out the countdown, cheering and embracing each other at the stroke of midnight. Mike gathered up El in his arms and kissed her and for a second, everything was bliss.

About an hour after the celebrations, the party was winding down. Everyone now relaxing on the sofas and floor lazily swapping stories with no rush to end the night. That's why, when the phone rang, everyone was slightly confused. All of their families were here, so who was calling? El, being closest to the kitchen phone, answered.

"Hello?" she asked.

"Oh, hey Jane! I was hoping to get you, it's Greg! I just wanted to wish you and Chief Hopper a happy New Year!" Greg's voice was cheerily animated as he spoke and El was touched he had thought to call and wish them a happy New Year. She looked back to the living room, everyone had gone back to telling their stories and eating snacks.

"Aww, Greg thank you. You too! I hope you had a good night." El smiled to herself, remembering how Greg had detailed to her how he was planning to spend his New Year with his girlfriend and their families.

“Is that Greg?” Jim called from the sofa. “Tell the kid happy New Year from us.” El nodded at him as Greg called back a “Happy New Year” she knew Hopper couldn’t hear. What she had missed during this was Mike’s head perk up and look at her questioningly when he heard the name.

“Yeah it was awesome,” Greg continued. “Lily loved the necklace. You were totally right to get a topaz, she hates rubies. She said she will have to thank you next time she sees you.” El smiled, she knew Lily was beyond kind and was happy she helped make her Christmas better.

“Well, you know me, the chief expert of sophistication,” El said in a mock-serious tone. It had taken some convincing to get Greg to listen to her, his eyes dubious when she suggested he change his present slightly.

He chuckled, recalling her proclaiming herself the ‘connoisseur of culture’. “That you are. Anyway, I’ve got to go. I’m glad you had a good vacation, I’ll see you back in the office next week.”

“Okay, I’ll see you then, Bye Greg.”

“Bye.” El hung up the phone, returning to her place on the floor next to Mike. He had re-joined the conversation but turned as she sat.

“Hey. Who was that?” He asked casually.

“Just Greg, he wanted to wish us a happy New Year,” El replied, attention already shifting back to the conversation between all their family.

“Bit weird,” Mike muttered quietly, also turning to face everyone again.

“Beg your pardon?” El tested, somewhat insulted.

“Nothing.” Mike left it, knowing an argument wasn’t needed right now.

When it came time for him to once again leave, the argument had already been long forgotten. It was a petty thing to be bothered

about, so Mike decided to not bring up his wariness of Greg, Eleven seemingly forgot about it anyway so there was no need to rehash it. When it came time for him to once again leave, Eleven was ashamed to find herself thinking that the goodbyes hurt less than they once did. Their reunions had become a cycle, his departures being the inevitable end.

“Listen,” Mike said, staring at his house as he stood with Eleven against his car. His bags were all packed in the trunk, and he was leaving soon. “I just want to say something, you might think I’m being stupid, but I just wanted to say it.” His face was tense, focused on how to voice his thoughts.

Eleven looked at him concernedly, trying to get him to meet her eye. “What is it, Mike? You know I’m not going to judge you, I’m here for you no matter what.”

“Well, that’s sort of it,” He shifted his eyes to her, still looking worried. “I think that when I’m away, it feels like you’re not – no – like *we’re* not.”

“Not what?” El furrowed her eyebrows, “Not there for each other? Of course we are!”

“No, I meant: we’re not *there*,” Mike said, exasperatedly trying to say what he meant. He had never been great at speaking, so El gave him a second to think. “It seems like whenever we call, the other person is never there. You can’t say you don’t think so. I just wanted to say it to you so we could try and sort out a more concrete like, schedule. So that we can talk.” He seemed satisfied with his words, looking at Eleven and waiting for her to respond.

“Mike I,” El started, taken aback by his candour. But she couldn’t argue with what he had said, he was right. She decided to give not feign disagreement. “When would you want to call?”

He smiled a little, clearly appreciating her not denying it. “What about on Sundays? I am usually just doing work and it gives a nice end to the week.”

“That sounds like a good plan, I’ll make an effort to get my work

done and call around 8ish?”

“Sounds good to me.” Mike smiled at her, relieved how well the conversation had gone. She smiled back, proud he had the confidence to admit he thought there was a problem. The Mike she’d known when she was a girl was too nervous to admit he thought she wouldn’t need him when she joined the middle school. But he was no longer a young boy who was scared to face his problems, he was growing and becoming more mature every day. They kissed, feeling more reassured of the future, and Mike left soon after.

It had worked too – for a while. Until Mike got set more assignments and El got promoted from deskwork to active duty. Then Mike became more stressed and so went out more in an attempt to relieve it and El spent more time at work. She and Greg were becoming close friends and now they felt more productive at work they celebrated. Max had also become a lot better friends with Greg, meaning he joined them more often and together they had a fun dynamic. El was happy with this development – Mike, not so much. The last straw came for him when El cut their call short after only half an hour because Greg wanted to go out and catch a movie.

“So, you two are just going to hang out? On your own? After spending all day at work together?” His skeptical tone annoyed Eleven, he knew she’d never do anything to upset him and she’d definitely never cheat.

“Yes, and you shouldn’t have a problem with it. He’s just my friend.” She didn’t see why he was being so unreasonable.

“I was ‘just your friend’ once, look how that turned out.” Mike’s bitterness escaped in his words. He didn’t really think she and Greg would do anything, but he was jealous of the time Greg got to spend with El. She was even giving up their call to go see him. It wasn’t fair.

“I’m hanging up now, you’re being ridiculous. I’ll speak to you in a couple of days when you’re ready to talk like an adult.” With that, she hung up the phone. If Mike wasn’t mature enough to see how silly this was then she wasn’t going to waste her time explaining it to him.

They didn't speak for over a week after that. Eleven had called Mike after three days to find out if he'd seen sense but he wasn't in. She called again the next day but again, no answer. She left a message telling him to call her and that she wanted to talk. Still, no reply. She decided to stop calling and spend time with her friends instead. She no longer rushed to the phone when it rang, she was sick of pandering to Mike's silent treatment. And so, when the phone rang the middle of the week, she almost didn't answer. Figuring it was probably a cold caller, she left it. But when it continued to ring, she gave up and went for the phone.

It turned out to be Will. He was planning to come home and visit that weekend as he had completed all his assignments early and wanted some home-cooked meals. Eleven spoke to him for an hour, catching up and planning his arrival. He wasn't far, The Cleveland School of Art less than a five-hour drive away, so he managed to come back more than once a month. Eleven missed him when he wasn't home. They were neighbours, his bedroom beside hers, and they had spent years crafting a secret system of knocks by which to communicate. After their catching up, they eventually hung up the phone. El promised to keep his visit a secret from Joyce, their Mom's face always lit up when she saw Will was home and he took every opportunity to surprise her. Almost as soon as she put the phone back on the hook it rang again. Thinking it was probably Will calling back, she answered quickly.

"Don't worry Will," She began, she knew he would be worried she would spill to Joyce and figured the faster she assured him, the less stressed he would be. "I promised, no need t—"

"Um, it's not Will." The voice cut her off. It was Mike. He sounded hesitant and sheepish but Eleven didn't care.

"Oh. What did you want?" She was blunt and her voice cold, she was annoyed at his childish behaviour – he was right to be nervous.

"Look, I'm sorry about last week. I don't know why I was like that." Mike stated, "Well, that's not true. It sounds stupid, but I panicked because it's hard being so far away and knowing you're out with some other guy. I spent the past few days trying to build up the nerve to call you and apologise." His tone sincere but it just riled Eleven up

more.

El's annoyance rose at his lame apology. "Are you kidding? Mike that doesn't excuse your stupid jealousy. It doesn't matter where you are, you don't get to be so antagonistic to me just because I am spending time with a guy who isn't you."

"I know, I know. And I know how I feel and how I chose to express those feelings is completely down to me. How I acted was wrong. I took my frustration out on you and I'll never do it again. I'm sorry, please forgive me." Mike sounded genuine and while she was still upset with him, she accepted his apology. "Oh, El. I'm so glad, I was so nervous you wouldn't forgive me. And look, I'm going to come back before spring break, so we can have a weekend alone to make it up to you I promise."

"It's okay Mike you don't have to I know you've got proje-" Eleven began to reassure but Mike cut her off.

"No, I mean it. I *promise*. This is important." Mike sounded so sure, it was hard for her not to be drawn in. She smiled slightly and accepted.

"Okay, but I can't do this weekend. Will is home visiting and I promised to help him surprise Mom."

"That's fine with me, my projects still need finishing anyway. But two and a half weeks? I'll be there in no time."

El allowed herself to get excited at that. Truthfully, she had really missed Mike and having him home, to catch up with and cuddle with sounded heavenly. "Okay, I'll see you in two and a half weeks."

Thinking he had his work pretty much in the bag after the first week of work, Mike took that weekend off. His friends had invited him to an underground gig for one of their favourite bands, so he was eager to spend the weekend relaxing and having a good time. He said to himself if he took Friday off, he could do the last of the work on Monday and submit it then instead. What happened next wasn't entirely Mike's fault. Due to overheating in the classroom in which it was being stored, his project for the end of year assignment was

wrecked and he had to restart. He panicked, if he messed this up, he would lose thirty percent of his overall grade. He knew he couldn't make it that weekend, so he called up El saying there was a slight hiccup and he would need an extra week to tweak the issues. But that hadn't been enough time, so he didn't return the next weekend or the one after that.

Every time he had to call he felt awful, determined that by the next weekend he would have it finished, and he would see Eleven. But each week he would discover something else wrong or that he'd missed. El also had other commitments which restricted when he could visit, site visits to neighbouring police departments, seminars to attend. She was nearing her biannual anniversary of joining Hawkins Police Department and they had arranged a small celebration in honour of her and Greg's first six months. Mike had assured her weeks prior he would attend. He didn't. As the end of term approached and not enough progress being made, El got more unconvinced in her replies to his apologies. "It's okay Mike," she'd say, "if you're not going to make it just tell me."

"No, I promised. I'll see you next week." Mike would say, too scared of how she would react to admit that he might not make it. Instead, he kept working, desperate to keep his word. It turned out, Mike wouldn't come home early at all like he had promised. This realisation hit El two weekends before his scheduled spring break. There were few things that could truly disappoint Eleven; one of them was Mike breaking a promise. They had established early on: *friends don't break promises*. But he had. It hadn't worked; he was out of time. With his project due next week and it still being incomplete, he had to call up El to cancel one last time. It was on that final phone call he told her what had happened those weeks ago. El told him where to stick it.

He was just as furious with himself. Could he not even finish his project early to visit his own girlfriend whom he hadn't seen in two months? Who was counting on him and his promise? He'd tried to call and apologise; the guilt was eating him up and made him a tense mess. But she'd just dismiss him, saying that it was fine – that *they* were fine – voice sounding dull from the speaker of his phone. Before the first night home of spring break was over, he excused himself

from his house to visit El. His mom had nodded, a smile on her face. "That's fine just don't be back too late tomorrow, we're having a family night." He mumbled an agreement and rushed out, kissing Holly on the forehead and promising tomorrow he'd spend the day however she wanted.

El had been expecting him. She heard from Will when Mike was due to driving home and as the day wore on she anxiously paced around the house, going over what she needed to say a hundred times in her head. Hopper noticed, him being the great detective he was.

"You alright, kid?" Spending so much time with her, it was hard for Jim to miss the change in El. As her boss, he had watched over the past months as her and Mike's attempted to stay in contact. He saw the calls dwindle, saw the smile El once had when eagerly answering the phone slowly diminish. Now, with Mike due back any day, she seemed nervous. As her father, he worried about her.

"Yeah, I'm fine Dad. Mike's coming home today, I'm just excited about that." She offered, knowing he wouldn't believe her, but sealing it with a dismissive gesture anyway. Jim knew he wasn't going to get her to admit anything if she didn't want to.

"Alright. I'm going to bed soon, got to be in the office early tomorrow. Try not to stay up too late, okay kid?" She nodded, not really paying attention to him as she stared out the front window. Hopper sighed and headed to bed knowing he couldn't do anything to help.

Mike arrived not long after. His car pulled up on the street outside and Eleven's stomach dropped. Before, having come home from college was like a fantasy come true. Now, reality was painted in shades of distress. She wasn't ready to face him, but she knew she had to.

When he exited the car, he jogged toward the house. Keeping his head down to avoid the gloomy weather, he missed seeing El watch him through the window. She opened the door before he could knock, knowing the doorbell would wake everybody in the house and alert them of his arrival. He opened his mouth to speak but she quickly motioned for him to be quiet, turning and leading him to her

room. Once there with the door fully closed, she took a second to steel herself before turning around to face him.

“Mike- ”

“El- ” They both started at the same time. Mike looked down sheepishly, allowing her to speak.

“Mike, why didn’t you just tell me earlier you weren’t going to make it home?” El asked, needing to know why he didn’t admit he had lost his work. “If you had, at least I could have prepared myself for you not coming home. But instead, you were too stubborn about keeping the promise that you did.”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t know it would take so long to redo, I honestly thought I could make it home early.” Mike seemed anxious to explain, he hadn’t meant to upset her.

“It’s not about you needing to do work, this is about you being honest with me. Don’t lie and build my hopes up because every time you canceled it hurt just as much as the first time.” El was losing energy, her fury melting into disappointment. She was too exhausted to be angry. Mike approached her slowly, pulling her in for a hug when he was close to her.

What specifically had happened to get them to this point, they didn’t know. They had survived Demogorgon’s, demodogs, closing the gate, and being apart for almost a year, Mike not even knowing if El was *alive*. Why was this time so different? The only changed factor was distance, but neither of them ever thought they would feel so disconnected and helpless due to such a trivial thing. They thought it would have been nothing in comparison to their past struggles. And yet, here they were, arguing over stupid things and speaking less and less. El cuddled in closer to his chest, seeking the comfort she once got from it.

“This isn’t going to work if we keep going the way we’re going. We’ll end up not recognising each other.” El confessed into the soft fabric of his jumper.

“I know, and I’m sorry. I was busy too often and didn’t prioritise you,

I haven't visited enough." Mike pulled back slightly so he could look at her face. "I really wish I could come see you more and I-"

"Don't," she interjected, sitting back to talk directly to him. "I'm busy just as often, it's not your fault. You shouldn't slave away at your work and not see your friends just to see me. You'll end up despising the work and eventually me as well."

"Eleven, I would nev- " Mike began, almost insulted at the idea, but Eleven silenced him with a look and a stern interruption.

"No, Mike. Let me finish." She was determined to get this out and Mike knew that, so he remained quiet and nodded for her to continue. "I know right now you can say you won't, but you will. I don't want you to be miserable there because of me. I want you to experience everything you can while you're there, you've grown into being such a confident and happy man, I would hate myself if I were the reason you had to stop."

"You would never restrict me, I'd be happy to change my schedule if it meant I got to see you more." Mike reassured, "I don't want us to feel so miserable if I know there's something I can do."

"But you'd make yourself miserable in the process. It won't kill us if we don't see each other, we just need to focus on being happy while we're apart." Eleven said, encouragingly. "I just- I can't sit around, waiting for you to come home. I have a life here, I can't keep relying on the possibility of you coming briefly home to make me happy." El said, it hurt her to admit but she knew she had to.

"Don't be ridiculous. You don't rely on me to be happy. You've got your friends, your work. You love your life." Mike tried to argue.

"Yes, I do, Mike. While I may be doing other things and even having fun, somewhere in my mind is always questioning when I'll see you next, or when I'll hear from you." The emotion was overwhelming for El but she pushed on, not letting herself get upset. "Don't try and tell me that's not even a little the same for you." She met his eyes, challenging him to deny it.

"Okay, maybe a little. But that's normal when you're in a

relationship, you're going to want to talk to them all the time." Mike countered, "We were like it even before I left."

"Maybe that's the problem, we'll both slowly get unhappier. I don't want to hate you." El said, fear and honesty emitting from her.

"I don't want that either. I do and always will want you in my life." Mike met her gaze, his guarantee reflected in her eyes as he spoke. "I will do anything to keep you Eleven, anything." She stared at him for a long time, her thoughts indistinguishable on her face.

"Maybe," she finally said, her sombre tone alarming Mike. "maybe we just need to stop depending on each other to feel happy. Then we wouldn't dislike or feel obligated to please each other." She studied his face, studying his reaction.

"Wh- How would we do that?" Mike stammered, already knowing what she was implying but not wanting to say it. He hadn't come over intending to provoke this conversation, but it was something that now seemed inescapable from the start.

"Maybe," She looked down and away from him as she began to speak, her mounting unwillingness to continue was almost painful for Mike to watch, but he knew they had to have this conversation. "we take a break, just for your final term." Her eyes darted back once she finished speaking, frantically searching his, looking for anger or upset. Mike couldn't hold her gaze, overwhelmed. He swallowed hard, staring at her rug, eyebrows knitted together. While it hadn't surprised him, hearing her say it made it so *real*. Eventually, he nodded.

"I think that would probably be best." He built up the nerve to raise his eyes once again. Her eyes were as comforting as they were nervous. God, he still loved her. He gave her a sad smile and she returned it. That was it.

"Do you want me to leave?" As always, he was so compassionate.

"No,"

His eyes questioned her answer; was she sure?

“I haven’t seen you in so long.” Was all she needed to say. Leaving now would feel too final.

Soon they were in bed it was much like the sleepovers they had had as children. They lay on opposite sides, careful not to touch. Because that’s not who they were anymore. Once he finally fell asleep – his slight snoring that had once never failed to lull Eleven to join him breaking the silence – she allowed herself to cry. Muffled sobs of disappointment meeting her pillow.

Author’s Note:

I will likely come back to this to do a mid-college/ end of college update on them and how their relationship changes. Thank you for reading.